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UMZILA'S KINGDOM:

A FIELD FOR CHRISTIAN MISSIONS.

BOSTON:
AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS.
1880.

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NOTE.

A PIONEER company is about leaving America for exploration and the establishment of mission stations in that portion of Southeastern Africa known as Umzila's kingdom. Very little has been published about this region, and that little is inaccessible to most even of our missionaries, and to those who endeavor to keep themselves well-informed upon such matters; it must be picked out here and there from volumes not at every one's hand; from reports of learned societies, and provincial periodicals. For those who are to take part in this work and have direction of it, and for the large number now becoming interested in all movements in the evangelization of Africa, this compilation is made.

JOHN O. MEANS.

MAY, 1880.

UMZILA'S KINGDOM.

AMONG the regions in Central Africa proposed for missionary operations at the meeting of the American Board at Syracuse, October 8, 1879, was one "known of old as Monomotapa, now the kingdom of Umzila." "Natal," it was said, "is not far distant, and the mission there could be helpful in this region. Indeed, it may seem best to expand the Natal mission and extend it up to this neighborhood, instead of making Gorongoso a new and special Central African mission."

The Prudential Committee has decided to take this latter course. While endeavoring to penetrate Central Africa on the West through Benguela to Bihè, on the southeastern side of the continent it is proposed to work up towards the lower Zambesi through the vast and inviting territory of Umzila, as yet unoccupied by Christian teachers. This movement, though of magnitude and importance sufficient to be independent if need be, is to have such intimate relation to the Natal-Zulu mission of the American Board, that it may be wisely constituted and considered as an expansion of that Zulu mission. This it is to be for the present.

WHERE THE REGION IS.

Umzila is paramount ruler of the region, in Southeastern Africa, which has for its northern boundary the lower Zambesi River, and for its southern boundary the Umcomasi or St. George's River, which empties into the Indian Ocean at Delagoa Bay. The coast line exceeds six hundred miles in length. The British claim South Africa from the Cape of Good Hope to

Delagoa Bay; the Portuguese claim from this bay to the Zambesi and beyond to Cape Delgardo. The authority of the Portuguese is not recognized except along the narrow strip of seashore. Over the inland territory, called the Gasa country, stretching from the ocean westward to the Chitivatanga Mountains, which are a continuation of the Drakenbergs, Umzila is king.

The Zambesi, which forms the northern border, is the fourth of the great rivers of Africa; it may be compared to the Mississippi as to the area it drains and the volume of water it discharges. It has its spring heads a little eastward of Bihè, scarcely more than three hundred miles from the Atlantic, while it empties into the Indian Ocean opposite Madagascar. The Scotch missions at Livingstonia and Blantyre are approached through the mouth of the Zambesi, and, with the Universities' missions are to occupy the country north of the lower portion of the river. South of it, for some six hundred miles, half way to the Cape of Good Hope, the country is under native heathen despotisms. Natal, the most northern English colony, borders on Zulu land, and a short distance beyond is this Gasa country of Umzila; it constitutes one of the great Zulu-Kafir kingdoms of which those of Mosilikatse, or Umseligazi, and Cetywayo are better known.

WHO IS UMZILA?

Fifty or sixty years ago a Zulu chief named 'Cnaba was driven out of his country by Chaka, "the great Napoleon of the Zulu supremacy." 'Cnaba crossed the Limpopo river, expelled the Portuguese from their settlements in the interior of Sofala, conquered the natives up to the Zambesi and established his capital in the salubrious highlands a hundred miles from the coast. Not long after, one of Chaka's generals named Manikusa, or Manikoos, was despatched to conquer the Portuguese at Delagoa Bay. Manikusa found the assegais of his Zulus no match for the powder and ball of the Europeans, and he retreated. Knowing that death awaited him if he returned home defeated, he ran away with his army into the Gasa country, overthrew

'Cnaba and took possession of the kingdom for himself. Umzila is the son of Manikusa, and reigns with the despotic authority of the Kafir kings. The country seems to be in a condition such as Zulu land was under Dingaan, Chaka's successor, when our missionaries reached Natal in 1835. Umzila and his Zulu Indunas, or sub-chiefs, hold in subjection the native tribes which 'Cnaba conquered.

WHAT IS KNOWN OF THE COUNTRY.

The Portuguese, three hundred years ago, were well acquainted with it. There is an account of this region by Father de Santos, a Dominican monk, translated in Pinkerton's Voyages.[1] The Jesuits had a mission station on Mount Gorongoso, "famed for its clear cold water and healthiness," and there are inscriptions on large square slabs on the top of the mountain, attributed to these fathers.[2] Gorongoso lies near Sofala, supposed once to be the Ophir of Solomon, and the gold mines of Manica, which formerly yielded immense treasures.

In modern times this region has remained scarcely visited by hunters, traders, or missionaries. In 1871 Carl Mauch came into the northern portion of it from the west and discovered ruins at Zimbaoe, which is not far from Umzila's kraal, and gave glowing accounts of gold mines to be opened. The same year, St. Vincent Erskine, an envoy of the colonial government, visited Umzila on his invitation. Subsequently Mr. Erskine made three journeys to the king, taking different routes, and thus became better acquainted with the country than any European. Mr.

[1] A general collection of the best and most interesting voyages and travels in all parts of the world; many of which are now first translated into English. Digested on a new plan. By John Pinkerton, author of Modern Geography, etc., etc. Illustrated with plates. Vol. XVI. London: Longman, etc., 1814, 4to, pp. 917. Africa: History of Eastern Ethiopia, originally written in the Portuguese language by the Rev. Father Joans dos Santos, of the Order of St. Domingo, and published at Paris in the year 1684.

[2] Livingstone's Travels and Researches in South Africa, ch. 32. Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi, ch. 1.

Dubois, and later Mr. Benningfield, a colonial gentleman, accompanied Mr. Erskine. From Natal the first time he proceeded to Delagoa Bay, and explored the region around the Limpopo River and thence to Inhambane Bay; from here he passed up the coast till he struck the Sabi River, and so onward to the rugged hights where Umzila resides. He returned by an inland route across the mountains to Lydenberg in the Transvaal. In his later journeys, which were for hunting and trading, he went seven or eight hundred miles by sea from Natal to Chuluwan Island or Chiluana, which is not far below Sofala, and from there he easily reached Umzila's capital, distant only one hundred and forty miles. In the journals of the Royal Geographical Society, 1875, vol. xlv, pp. 45–128; 1878, vol. xlviii, pp. 25–57, the narratives of Mr. Erskine's explorations cover more than a hundred octavo pages.

PHYSICAL FEATURES.

The immediate seaboard has little that is attractive, except at the mouths of the rivers and in the bays, which are more numerous and afford better harbors than down the English coast. Going north from Natal, three hundred miles northeast of Durban, the town of Lourenzo Marquez, which is on Delagoa Bay, the southern point of the Portuguese, is described as a "mass of grass huts, reed fences, decayed forts, small proportion of Europeans, and large of half-castes, Banyans, Mussulmans, Brahmins, Tongas, slaves and freedmen, sand dunes, narrow streets, flat-roofed houses, cocoa-nut trees, and stench, enclosed by a wall about six feet high, recently erected and protected by bastions, at intervals mounting heavy guns." Though very unhealthy, the magnificent harbor gives it great importance. Its population of twenty-six hundred has recently been increased by colonists and artisans sent from Portugal to recruit its strength.

Inhambane Bay, two hundred and fifty miles from Delagoa Bay, is a fine sheet of water twenty miles long and three or four broad, surrounded by cocoa-nut palms. The town is of some consideration, built upon a hog-backed hill, almost surrounded by

the sea at high tide. There are a number of European traders, Portuguese and French, and a higher tone of society prevails than in some other coast towns. Since the extinction of the slave-trade, legitimate commerce has inaugurated a new era and the place is rapidly rising. A large church and a mosque are notable landmarks. The population is given as six thousand and five hundred.

About two hundred miles north of Inhambane and a less distance south of the Zambesi is Chiluana or Chuluwan, a low island nine miles long with a wide channel between it and the main land. It faces the delta of the river Sabi. The town in 1873 contained "about eighteen Europeans and four thousand Arabs, Moors, half-castes and natives. There are two French merchants. There is no place of public accommodation. The climate is cool and pleasant in the winter season."

Sofala Bay, forty miles north of Chiluana, is a fine natural harbor near the mouth of the Great Sofala River, and the town is reported to have a population of two thousand.[1] Several large rivers which rise in Umzila's highlands and mountains, the Sabi, the Gorongosi, the Busi, reach the ocean very near Sofala and Chiluana, and from these places is the natural and easy approach into the healthy and fertile uplands.

For a breadth of from seventy to eighty miles from the sea the country is a low plain, with numerous valleys cutting through the limestone rocks and giving passage to broad streams which are shallow in the dry season and swollen with turbid floods after the rains. Scrub bushes and coarse grasses form the vegetation, except in the river valleys. Like the *Mrima* on the Zambesi, Mozambique, and Zanzibar coasts, this sea-coast is unhealthy. Back of it the country rises into highlands and into mountains of four thousand and of four thousand five hundred feet elevation. The mountain streams are wild, the scenery is picturesque, and "the climate is as delightful as that of Madeira." Umzila's kraal lies back of lofty peaks on a table-land

[1] "Sofála signifies in Arabic a plain, or low country." Baines's Gold Regions of Southeastern Africa, Preface.

of three thousand two hundred feet elevation. The heights are richly wooded. The vine grows, and wheat. In sheltered valleys tropical fruits abound.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF UMZILA'S CAPITAL.

Following an affluent of the Busi, says Mr. Erskine, — whose narrative we condense, preserving his own language — he passed through a fertile and well inhabited country. A stony ridge was ascended; the barometer indicated fifteen hundred feet above the sea. The view from the western slope was one of the finest he had seen. Due west the valley seemed to open out into the plain. To the north, abrupt, wooded mountains capping each other were visible, until closed in by the grass-clad Sissungambili crowned with timber. Turning to the east, the ridges appeared to end abruptly in a densely wooded cañon, which debouched into the Busi, whose wooded banks seemed to close the view. Beneath, the valley of the Umswelisi lay rolled out like a picture, with its meandering waters fringed by evergreen trees; and it looked smiling and peaceful in the checkered frame. This valley of the Umswelisi seems destined some day to be one of the most productive spots on this side of the continent. Sugar and coffee would succeed admirably here; and from its elevated position he believes it will be found quite healthy. The Mandowa tribe, which inhabits all the hill country and the plains as far as Sofala, appears at one time to have been very powerful, though it submitted without fighting to the Zulu chief 'Cnaba. The Umswelisi is a fine, clear stream, flowing over a rocky bed of porphyry and basalt. The flow of water would be sufficient to irrigate this great and fertile flat and to turn mills. The path over the range is eighteen hundred feet above the sea. Descending four hundred feet, he crossed the Shinike River, also a strong, rocky stream, waist deep, and ascended the rise on the opposite side. Here he found kraals, and cultivations of bananas, gingenelly and cereal crops, all in the highest state of productiveness. Passing two more streams, he ascended to a valley-like plateau, and stopped at Makuan's kraal, in the

Gwingi district. From this kraal, two thousand feet above the sea, three timber-clad peaks were seen to the west, called Urobi, Sissungambili and Silindi. Behind the latter lay Umzila's kraal, called Tshamatshama or Nodwengu, situated at the sources of the Umswelisi. The most elevated plateau was now reached, ranging between thirty-three and thirty-six hundred feet above the sea.

On his fourth visit, Mr. Erskine found Umzila in a new kraal, a little south, called Utshani-Udi.

One thing that disagreeably impresses the traveler is the size and hight of the grass growing on the slopes. So high, in fact, is it that no view can ever be obtained of the country, and it forms quite an arched way under which you pass along, opening a path with your stick and hands. The grass seeds, like javelins, descend in showers and fill your clothes until you are nearly driven mad with the itching, and blinded as well. You cannot walk through it until ten o'clock without getting as wet as if you had been through a river, the dews are so heavy.

To say this country around Umzila's kraal is full of interest is but expressing a tame opinion of its geographical and geological features. Mr. Erskine considers this peculiar basin of mountains, as forming the source of the Busi, one of the most interesting problems of modern geography. By its proper exploration a knowledge will be obtained of vast regions of healthy country closely adjoining the port of Sofala. If the streams descended to the plains in a direct course, it would be impossible to ascend this plateau without gigantic road-works. But these affluents of the Lusiti run north, and descend so gradually that even railway works could be successfully carried up them as far as Umzila's kraal and the highest points of the plateau.

HOW TO REACH TSHAMATSHAMA.

Tshamatshama, the king's residence, is in latitude 20° 23′ S, and longitude 32° 30′ E; the elevation is thirty-two hundred feet above the sea. In a bee line it is distant from Lydenberg about three hundred and forty-five miles; from Zoutpansberg, one

hundred and seventy-four miles; from Matabili's—LoBenguela's—kraal, one hundred and eighty miles; from Cape Town, eleven hundred and ninety miles; from Durban, five hundred and eighty miles; from Delagoa Bay, three hundred and thirty-five miles; from Inhambane, two hundred and fifty miles; from Chiluana, one hundred and forty miles; from Sofala, one hundred and twenty-five miles; from Quillimane, three hundred miles; from Senna, two hundred and fifty miles; from Tete, two hundred and sixty miles. The two nearest points, Sofala and Chiluana, which can be reached by steamers, also afford the greatest facility of approach in every way and with less physical difficulty than any other. The bar at Sofala is a great obstruction to the port. It must be borne in mind that all domestic animals die from some mysterious poison taken in on the bushy plains; though only a small percentage of donkeys are lost. Camels and elephants have not been tried. The low country is healthy during July, August, September, and October, so that Europeans can traverse them in these months. Chiluana is a safe and convenient harbor, and offers water way some distance into the interior, where the country is open and free from swamps, and is altogether a very desirable *point d'appui.* Large running streams can be followed quite up to the mountains. Wood is sometimes too plentiful, though the dense bushes could be avoided, and the route taken through park-like country. There is no scarcity of grass, so that fodder need not be carried. In fact, a country more adapted to Europeans could scarcely be found; and when once on the pleateau there is a climate superior to that of Europe. The fever, which prevails at Inhambane and at all the other towns on the east coast north of the 27th parallel of south latitude, does not extend beyond the foot of the mountain steeps. These plateaux of Africa are (at all events in the southern parts) generally as healthy as Madeira.

Mr. Erskine left Natal June 25, 1871, and reached Lydenberg on his return September 29, 1872, so that he was in the country fourteen months, and saw it in all the seasons. On his third journey he left Natal May 12, 1873, in a sailing vessel,

reached Chiluana July 30, and started for Umzila's kraal at Tshamatshama, one hundred and forty miles in a direct line.

The route which he traversed is a very important track, as it is one of the main roads from the unhealthy and sterile districts of the coast to the salubrious and fertile mountain regions of the interior. His allusion to the sterile coast districts must, however, he says, be understood to be restricted to the flat, sandy, brush-covered plains which spread outside of the alluvial deposits of the Sabi and other streams; tracts that are themselves fertile even near to the sea-board.

The mouth of the Sabi is a few hours' sail to the south of Chiluana, with a dangerous bar; but a large accessible creek, called Maluli, runs up into the delta opposite the island, and he entered this creek, which has several lateral communications with the Sabi. Having placed his goods in store, he sent off a messenger to Nonxanga, a Zulu sub-chief of Umzila in charge of this territory, to ask for porters to his place, and then found amusement in hunting antelopes and guinea-fowls. The natives, he declares, are not a pleasant race to live amongst. The Umgonis, or Zulu section of the community, are completely the masters of the Portuguese; they are indolent in the extreme, and subsist mainly by robbing the Tongas.

On the 10th of September he received four donkeys that had been twenty days on the road from Inhambane. On the 18th he sent off fifty loads of merchandise, and on the 21st started himself for Umzila's. He had seventeen carriers and thirty hunters in his party. One of his donkeys was killed by a hyena, and a second was not in a fit state to ride; but the remaining two rendered him inestimable service, and, in reality, carried him to Umzila's and back. They beat the natives on the march because they do not need the same amount of rest. He attributes his almost entire immunity from fever and illness upon this journey to the fact that his donkeys saved him from exhaustive exertion in the great heat. On his fourth journey Mr. Erskine also used donkeys, and with equal satisfaction. The donkey requires very careful handling in the matter of equipment, as he readily chafes.

The crupper, breast-plate, girths, and haunch-straps should all be cased in sheep-skin, and a pad rather than a pack-saddle should be adopted.

"On this journey I found that there is only one possible way in which the native Tongas can be dealt with. On arriving at a kraal, I always demanded what I required and took what I wanted, and then gave them an equivalent present when I left. I failed entirely to get necessary supplies by any attempt at an open bargain and purchase. I limited my progress to about twelve miles per day, because I found that when I exceeded this distance I could not get my men in by nightfall."

After crossing the Sabi River, October 4, he passed through a district inhabited by the Hlenga (pronounced *Thlenga*) tribe, an offshoot of the great Makololo race. The Tongas of the district are properly Mandowas or Umyi. He here entered a country of open woods and grass, resplendent in this mid-spring season with verdure. The trees were laden with flowers, which filled the air with strong perfume. The most powerful fragrance came from the insignificant flowers of a kind of vine called the Umtshanjowa, which bears an edible fruit, that is made by the natives into a blood-red wine. He soon after crossed the Upipa River, an affluent of the Gorongosi, and then traversed an open grassy country, bearing ivory palms and abounding in game. His next stopping-place was the kraal of Ishoppa, an old friend, who gave him a cordial welcome, and feasted him with goat's flesh, corn, and Kafir beer. When he went on from this place, after a full day's rest, Ishoppa sent on fifteen women with water-pots for his use, as he had some distance to traverse where there was no water.

Thus far the track had been quite accessible for wagons, but beyond this no wagon could have passed. The country was now a succession of hills, valleys and streams. At Umkontwain he came to the kraal of Kater, a brother of Umzila, and was hospitably entertained. On the 16th of October, Umzila's Indunas came down to him with an invitation to visit the king. On the following day Mr. Erskine found him at one of the royal gardens,

where he was celebrating the opening of the hunting season by a kind of public ceremonial. He gave him a friendly reception, and proposed that he should bring up his goods to the kraal. Mr. Erskine wanted permission to pass on to Umsiligasi's (Mosilikatsi's) territory, but found there was war, and that Umzila was jealous and adverse to any trade communication passing on. Umzila avowedly aims at keeping the gold produce of Manica to himself. He refused permission to visit the fields, and said that when his ivory was done, he intended to work them for his own benefit. The climate is eminently healthy and cool in these upper regions, and well suited to cattle, and to the cultivation of wheat and the vine. Cotton, sugar, and coffee also thrive in the deeper and warmer valleys. It is much to be regretted, adds Mr. Erskine, that the Portuguese have not a well-ordered province from Delagoa Bay to the Zambesi, with its seagate at Sofala. The Zambesi itself would be more easily approached in this course than along its own water channel.

Soon after arriving at Umzila's place (October 16) the rainy season began. The rain sets in with a driving mist from the east and south-southeast, which is shortly followed by thunder and lightning, and rain then falls for two or three days. Northerly and westerly winds restore the fine weather.

There are fine forests of hard wood on the slopes of the Silinda and Sissumyambili mountains; trees four feet in diameter and sixty feet high, with trunks as straight as pines. Elephants, antelopes and buffaloes abound.

There can be no doubt that Umzila is by no means himself a powerful chief. His influence among the native tribes is mainly dependent upon a reputation he possesses of having some powerful wizards in his service, who fight with diseases and the elements instead of with arms. He is very much feared by the surrounding chiefs on this ground. Mr. Erskine was detained by false promises and under various pretenses for nearly two months. He commenced his return to the Sabi on the 9th of December; delaying long enough to finish his business, he reached Chiluana January 22, 1874.

The common maps of this region are quite incorrect. The entire coast abounds in fine harbors, which contrast singularly with the poverty of the English possessions in this particular. An admirable map, on a large scale, of this part of Africa, accompanies *The Gold Fields of Southeastern Africa*, by Thomas Baines, F. R. G. S., issued under the supervision of Henry Hall, Esq., F. R. G. S., Edward Stanford, 55 Charing-Cross, publisher, November 1, 1876.

THE NATIVE POPULATION.

Near to the Portuguese frontier in the approach toward Inhambane, Mr. Erskine made the acquaintance of a people known as the "Marongwes," whom he distinguished unconditionally as the finest race he had any communication with. They are of the same blood as the Chobis, Mandandas and Mashongonini, and bear a somewhat marked resemblance to the Basutos. They are armed with strong, six-feet bows, are very brave, and are reputed to have great skill in bush-fighting. They live in dense communities, and clear and plant large stretches of ground, sometimes exceeding a hundred acres in extent, which are cultivated in common, with the families of the cultivators scattered around the margin of the clearing in separate kraals. The country was thickly inhabited, and abounded in fowls, corn, beer and honey; in some places these people possess cocoa-nut palms, the sugar cane and bananas, and distil ardent spirits with stills of native manufacture. Gigantic specimens of baobab trees abound, covered by castana-nut creepers, which are festooned to the ground and form magnificent canopies, impervious to the sun's rays. Mr. Erskine dwells quite admiringly upon the interesting scenery produced by the thriving gardens of this industrious race, ornamented and interspersed with the magnificent canopies of foliage.

The Mandowa race, which occupies the hill country of Sofala, is said to be a branch of the Makalala tribe. It submitted to the Zulus, without fighting, at the time of the invasion of

'Cnaba, and has since remained tributary to Umzila, by whose father 'Cnaba was dispossessed. Their own hereditary chief, Umgapi, still dwells on the Umkini River, some distance toward the north. The southwestern frontier of the supremacy of the Zulu chief Umzila is now at the commencement of Manhlin, in 22° 50′ S. All the tribes within this frontier, whether Chobi, Basiga, Bila-Kulu, Mandanda, or Mandowa, are classed together as Tongas, although severally of different blood and origin; that designation is simply the general title of contempt for the subject tribes which has been applied to them by their Zulu conquerors, who in their turn are distinguished throughout this district as Umgonis.

How numerous the Zulus proper are in Umzila's Kingdom, is not known. Along the south bank of the Zambesi, between Gorongoso and Senna, they are called Landeens, and are not in very good odor. Precisely where mission work shall be commenced, except that it will be in the healthy highlands, and among what particular tribes, the visit of the pioneer company is to determine. Mr. Reuben Benningfield, who knows the people well, gives hearty encouragement to the mission. As long ago as 1876, our brethren at Natal, at their annual mission meeting, reported: "It may be a subject for wise reflection whether we ought not to shape our efforts and lay our plans to commence soon an initiatory work among Umzila's people, or some other tribe speaking the Zulu language, a thousand miles or so northward, with the ultimate design of concentrating our labors outside of, rather than in, Natal." In a letter received last year, Rev. Josiah Tyler writes: "Mr. Benningfield was emphatic in his assertion that he could see no reason why judicious missionaries might not be successful in Umzila's territory, and even went so far as to say that he was willing to accompany a band of missionaries personally and introduce them to the king. He confirmed the opinion I gathered some years ago from Mr. St. Vincent Erskine, that the climate of Umzila's country inland is *healthy*. Evidently the way to go to that field is by steamer to

Chiluana; then, as Mr. Benningfield suggests, notice should be sent to the chief, in accordance with the laws of the country. Married men should go first alone, prepare accommodations, and then return to Natal for their wives. Here would be the place for them to take their first lessons in the language, for Umzila and all his people are pure Zulus; all our books will answer for them. Mr. Benningfield told me they would be in no danger from the people. The risk to life, as you will infer from what I have said, would be small, if the entrance to the country is effected in winter, and the place of residence is fixed inland."

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